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Thesis

WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS DEVELOPED IN HIS LETTERS

by

Benjamin Livingston DuVal

(A.B., Asbury College, 1928)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS DEVELOPED IN HIS LETTERS.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LETTERS.

In John Wesley's Sermons and more formal works we get a statement of the doctrines and practices characteristic of the early Methodists. The Journal gives us not only a more intimate view of Wesley's own experiences, but a splendid picture of eighteenth century England. But it remains for the "Letters" to give us a still more intimate picture of Wesley's own thought and attitude, of his unfolding religious experiences, and how, not to mention why, he performed his great work in leading the Evangelical Revival. John Telford well says of the "Letters" in his introduction to the Standard Edition of the Letters which was recently published:* "They form the most intimate picture of Wesley that we possess.....Wesley is here in his habit as he lived." Wesley has had his biographers and biographers, but one who really desires to understand him will not be satisfied until he finds in his correspondence the true Wesley.

*Letters of John Wesley, A.M., Vol. I, Introduction, P. XVIII.

With the exception of the years 1722 and 1728 we have letters for all of the seventy years between 1721 and 1791. There are in all 2,670 letters which have been preserved out of the voluminous correspondence the indefatigable writer carried on. These letters are usually signed "J. Wesley," though "John" is sometimes written out in full. The recent edition, in eight volumes (1931), of this important Methodist literature by The Epworth Press, London, and ably edited by John Telford, B.A. is entitled "The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M., Sometimes Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, Standard Edition," and constitutes a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of Wesley and the Methodist movement.

Wesley wrote for many different purposes, and on varied subjects. But it is always John Wesley that is writing. He is always himself, plain, concise, simple, straightforward, precise, and thorough. The letters may be roughly classified as follows: (1) Letters written to his parents giving explanations, asking advice, or for the purposes of keeping in touch with home. (2) Friendly letters,as those to Mrs. Pendarves. (3) Letters containing formal reports to those in authority

over him. (4) Letters asking for, and letters giving advice on religious questions or problems of practical conduct. (5) Letters containing directions for those associated with him. (6) Letters in explanation and defense of Methodism and her doctrines. (7) Controversial letters in which he iehter boldly defended the doctrines he preached, or in which he attacked opinions that he considered erroneous and dangerous. (8) Letters written to prominent statesmen concerning some national policy or event. But however hurriedly Wesley wrote, he wrote with a definite purpose and that purpose was stated as briefly as possible. One letters has only eight words. It is dated June 1, 1784, and says, "Dear Simon, you shall be in Oxfordshire. Adieu." But in the controversial letters Wesley deals with the subject as fully as he thinks necessary.

The orderliness, which was one of Wesley's chief characteristics, stands out prominently in his letters. As John Telford says, "Constitutionally, he was a Method---ist; and the discipline, both of early and later life, together with the divine grace working upon that personal characteristic, at once developed, and inspired it. His Methodism he carried out consistently in all

things to which he put his hand. In the construction of a sermon, in the organization of a new church, in the framing of a letter, and in everything else, great and small, he was emphatically a metho--ist." *

It is in his letters that we find some of the most famous sayings associated with Wesley. Writing to his brother Samuel, December 5, 1726, he says, "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another. I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged to me." ** The most famous saying occurs in a letter dated March 20, 1739, and is addressed to James Herney: "I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation." *** How rich an insight these statements give us of John Wesley! But these are not all. There is a certain richness of expression in many

*Letters, Vol. I, Introduction, P. XVI.

**Ibid, P. 34.

***Ibid, P. 286.

of the letters that make them interesting reading now, even if the subject matter has long since ceased to be of vital moment.

The letters, then, give us valuable insights that better enables us to understand the man and his work, In them we see Wesley's religious experience revealed. His scholarship, leadership, organizing ability, and skill in the art of debate, are all found in his letters. In the letters, too, we see his doctrines come into being and attain maturity. But we are most interested in Wesley's religious experience. In his correspondence we can trace Wesley's growing dissatisfaction with perfunctory religion, a tendency toward asceticism, his search for a vital religions experience that culminated on May 24, 1738, and the fluctuations of feeling which, following that, finally yielded to a mature experience that remained fairly constant during the remainder of his life. In this paper we shall attempt to trace the developing religious experience of Wesley until it ceased to be a variable factor and became a constant and unchanging dynamic that motivated the prophet of his century in his far flung work for Christ and humanity.

WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AS DEVELOPED IN HIS LETTERS.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE APPROACH.

When we come to study the developments of Wesley's religious experience we find that it falls into three main divisions: (1) The first includes the first twenty-two years of his life, and takes him through Charterhouse and Oxford to 1725, when he made his decision to enter the ministry. (2) This period begins with his serious thought on religion in 1725 and continues until May 24, 1738, when he felt his "heart strangely warmed." (3) The third division begins with his experience in 1738 and carries him through a period of vacillation to the mature experience that continued more or less unchanged to his death. These are not extremely obvious divisions, but serve best our purpose in tracing his experience.

The first period may really be called the Preparatory period. In it we shall see the development of ideas and habits which loomed large in the religious life of the Wesley of later years. Many contributions to his life during this time were of a decisive character, as, for instance, the formative influence of his mother on his life.

In the second period we find Wesley searching for the meaning of Christianity in terms of experience. In this quest we see him turn to a priestly conception of the church as the institution of salvation, to asceticism, to indefatigable industry in attempting to work out his own salvation, to mysticism, and, finally, baffled and disappointed, we find him turning to a personal experience of "saving faith" in which he found the true dynamic of the Christian life and its essential satisfaction. This is the decisive period in Wesley's life. What happened in this period laid the foundation for the spiritual Wesley of later years, who was the mighty prophet of the "Evangelical Revival." The influences exerted upon him, the decisions made, the motives which actuated him, and the experiences he had during these years, were all of far reaching con-

sequence. If we are to understand the development of John Wesley's religious experience at all adequately we must understand these all important years of his life. The period may be called "Religious questioning and answer."

In the third period there is fluctuation and growth into Christian maturity. After the experience of May 24, 1738, Wesley's attitude toward his own inner life vacillated for a time before it deepened into a steady stream that poured its waters into a spiritually parched and thirsty England. Little fluctuation in his experience is discernible during the later years of his life. Let us term this division the New Man.

The Secular and Religious Viewpoint.

In the study of this important first period of Wesley's life students are prone to fall into one of two errors due to their secular or religious viewpoints. The secular mind seems to have a tendency to explain him as an abnormal boy with some peculiar

psychosis of a religious nature. On the other hand, the religious student is usually found explaining Wesley in terms of Divine Providence. The world needed a prophet and God sent him to lead the Evangelical Re-Vival. There may be an element of truth in both positions, but it seems a mistake to attempt to interpret Wesley's developing personality on such a basis. Either notion gives the wrong perspective, for in reality the life of the boy and youth is being visioned through the career of the man. In other words, the life of Wesley after 1738 has colored the first thirty-five years of his life until the events in it have been magnified out of all proportion, or misinterpreted. The first thirty-five years are to be interpreted in their own light.

Our Viewpoint.

In this paper we shall attempt to hold a position about midway between the secular and religious points of view. We shall study Wesley neither as representing a type of insanity, nor as a special

gift of God, but as a normal boy. The development of the religious genius may best be understood by the hereditary and environmental influences brought to bear on him. The years of the period carry their own explanation of his remarkable religious development. Let us, then, consider Wesley as a normal person growing in a normal way.

THE PREPATORY PERIOD.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

In Wesley's parentage there was the sturdy element which he later manifested and used to so great an advantage. On both his mother's and father's side he was descended from a priestly ancestry who made religion the chief business of life. Both grandfathers had been dissenting ministers who were persecuted for their puritanism. Samuel and Susanna Wesley, true to the parental pattern, did their own thinking, which landed them back in the Church of England. Both were deeply religious, with their high churchly ideas secondary to a fine practical piety and discipline. At Epworth rectory Samuel and Susanna lived for thirty years (1697-1735). It was a hard and difficult place and yielded small returns, either financially or spiritually. Here Susanna gave birth to nineteen children, of whom nine died in infancy. The ten remaining were,without exception,

talented and accomplished. It was no ordinary family hidden away in this secluded spot. Rigg describes the Wesley ancestry well when he says, "Both the rector and his wife came of a line of puritan ancestors, who had endured persecution for their faith, but who were at once gentlemen, scholars, and divines; and the training in the parsonage was not unworthy of such a two-fold ancestry." * While one may easily over-estimate the influence of heredity on Wesley one may also easily under-estimate it. It will suffice for the moment to say that it is reasonable to believe it gave him a capacity for, and predilection toward religion, as well as an inquiring mind that insisted upon searching out its inner and most profound meaning.

Before Charterhouse.

The Epworth rectory was a home for the numerous children in more than the ordinary sense. We like the succinct characterization of Rigg; "It was the home of strict and earnest religion, of much learning, of true high breeding, and of pinching and sometimes bitter

*Rigg, The Living Wesley, P. 24.

poverty."* This implies the strict discipline to which all of the children were amenable. The children were carefully trained by a wise and efficient mother. She attended to their elementary education and to their religion. The children early learned the Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, and the Bible. At an alloted time each week the sagacious mother counselled each of the children in private. John's turn came on Thursday.

It seems that John early began to stand out from the other children, due to his seriousness, studiousness, and sharp reasoning. He insisted upon an answer for every question, and a reason for every act. The eager mind was already critical and inquiring as to the how and why of things. The rector,upon one occasion remarked, "I profess, sweetheart, I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature, unless he could give a reason for it."** In his religious life he was no whit behind the intellectual. So good was his conduct that his strict father admitted him to the communion table at the age of

*Ibid, P. 24.

**Clarke, Wesley's Family, Vol. II, P. 321.

eight.* He was in no sense a vulgar, happy-go-lucky child, and early showed his tendency to take life seriously. All of this simply means that Wesley's mind and spirit were early asserting themselves in conformity to the home discipline. To him it was a model home, and during his later ministry he referred to its precepts and discipline as almost ideal.

Burning of the Rectory.

When John was five years of age the rectory was destroyed by fire and he was the last rescued, and indeed, almost perished in the flames. He later described himself as a "brand plucked from the burning." But in doing this he was merely using an apt scriptural expression, which suggests what Dr. George Croft Cell likes to call "his vocational consciousness" or "sentiment of destiny," characteristic of his later years. It is not to be conceived of as having any far reaching effect upon him at the time other than a normal fear of the fire. It

*Tyerman, Life and Times of Wesley, P. 19.

possesses no special significance of importance at all.

At Charterhouse, 1713-1717.

Wesley's four years at Charterhouse have little significance for his religious experience for two good reasons: We know practically nothing about him during this period, and nothing decisive occurred to seriously effect his religious life. He did manifest here, as at home, a serious and efficient studiousness that became one of his great characteristics. He was deprived of his meat by the older boys at the school, and in after years he refers to it as a good thing. It is said that his desire to dominate others led him to associate with the younger boys,rather than with his equals, but this is of no particular value. Pertinent, however, is the remark that the years at Charterhouse seemed to find Wesley under less rigorous religious influence than any other period of his life. Perhaps he was more a carefree and normal boy then than his later life would indicate.

The Epworth Ghosts.

Sometime near the close of this period, the Epworth ghost, "Old Jeffry," made his appearance at the rectory. There is no evidence that Wesley was influenced in any particular way by this occurrence, though in common with the general opinion of the day, he believed in the reality of such preternatural beings. Wesley was too sensible, too much under the domination of an inquiring mind, to place too much emphasis upon such things. He was singularly able to isolate the non-essentials from the essentials throughout his life, and nowhere do we find him approaching fanaticism on such points as these.

CHAPTER III.

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

Wesley was an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, from June 24, 1720 to 1725, with an income of forty pounds a year. The letters testify as to how difficult it was to make ends meet on this small stipend, but he did, after a fashion. Here he maintained his studious habits and his strict moral life. His religion may be characterized as nominal. He attended worship regularly, communed reasonably often, and otherwise conducted himself as a young man of high moral standards, with a wholesome respect for religion. The orderliness ofvhis life was remarkable and gave proof again of that methodistic and systematic mind that a vital religion was to find such an ally in later. But while Wesley was interested in religion in a nominal sense, his real interest was in the classics and his intellectual work. The eager and hungry mind was feeding itself upon the best intellectual food the university afforded. He was sharpening

his polemic powers during these years, too, in engaging in various discussions, and seems to have been able to easily put his opponents to route. A writer acquainted with Wesley during his undergraduate days describes him as a "very sensible, active, collegian, baffling every man by the subtleties of his logic, and laughing at them for being so easily routed; a young fellow of the finest classical tastes, of the most liberal and manly sentiments, gay and sprightly, with a turn of wit and humor."* Nor was the social side of his life neglected. He formed and enjoyed friendships with both men and woman and found delight in innocent amusements on occasion.

There is one thing brought out in the few letters preserved for us from Wesley's undergraduate days that deserves brief mention, namely, his interest in ghosts. In four instances, references are made to stories of unusual happenings about Oxford.** That Wesley gave some credence to these reports is not strange, since they were generally believed, but it is strange why he should be so interested in them as

*Mr. Badcock, in Westminster Magazine, quoted by Rigg, The Living Wesley, P. 39.

**Vol. I, Letters of Sept. 23, 1723, Nov. 1, 1724, and Dec. 18, 1724.

to include them in his letters. Do we have here an insight into a mind that had a predilection for the supernatural or abnormal in life?

PART II.

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONING AND ANSWER.

CHAPTER IV.

1725; A YEAR OF CRISIS.

One of the decisive years in the life of John Wesley was 1725. Perhaps it was the most decisive for it witnessed a change in his attitude toward religion from a perfunctory acceptance of it to an earnest and serious consideration of its true nature and demands. This year, too, he definitely decided to enter the ministry of the church, which resulted in his ordination as deacon by Bishop Potter on September 19. Religion became the "business of his life" henceforth. Biographers generally agree that this was a crucial year in his life. Winchester says that it "marks the beginning of a new chapter in the religious life of Wesley." * J. H. Overton agrees that at the age of twenty-two "a great change came over him."** Rigg adds that a "decided change came

*Life of John Wesley, P. 20.

**John Wesley, P. 13.

over his thought and feeling."*

The reasons for this change are not difficult to find. In the first place, he was at the end of his undergraduate days, and face to face with what he was to do with his life. Those of us who have passed through a similar experience know full well how serious we become over the future as we come to the close of our collegedays. A decision must be made. Our vocation must be decided upon. Wesley was no different from the rest of us so it is perfectly normal that he should seriously consider to what his life was to be devoted. It was perfectly natural, also, that his religious training and priestly ancestry should lead him to favor the ministry as his life work. Perhaps the career of a scholar appealed to him more than anything other than the ministry. It was not a question between the ministry and some other vocation, but rather the motives that should actuate him in choosing the ministry. What were the proper motives for entering the ministry.

For the solution of this problem he sought

*The Living Wesley, P. 39.

the advice of his parents. His stern and high principalled father advised delay and more thought before definitely deciding, since he feared that his motive was a livelihood, and not serious enough. But his keen sighted mother discerned something deeper than that and advised that he take orders as soon as possible. "I was much pleased with your letter to your father about taking orders," she writes, "and liked the proposal well; but it is an unhappiness, almost peculiar to our family, that your father and I seldom think alike. I approve the disposition of your mind and think the sooner you are a deacon the better. God Almighty direct and bless you." * This is a characteristic bit of encouragement toward a deeper religious life that Wesley received from his mother, whose influence was of the highest and holiest kind. His father also soon changed his mind and saw the advisability of uring "Jack" to take Holy Orders as soon as possible. Wesley was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter on September 19, 1725. On that day was inducted into the ministry one of the men who have not only made the ministry a glorious calling, but wielded

*Winchester, P. 13.

a farflung influence in the interest of the kingdom of God.

There are some books which Wesley read for the first time in 1725 that must be considered in this connection, for they had a profound influence upon his religious thinking and life. The first of these was Thomas A. Kempis' Christian pattern, a man, as Wesley describes him, of "great piety and devotion." But Wesley writes immediately to his mother of reading the book and says that it is his "misfortune to differ from him in some of his main points." * In particular, he mentions Kempis' asceticism, which regarded mirth "vain and useless, if not sinful," and misery as necessary to the highest Christian life. Wesley revolted from such doctrines. He argues against such a position and quotes the Psalms and Proverbs, and cites the example of Job in refutation. It is clear that he believes innocent pleasures and joy to be perfectly compatible with Christianity. Rigg is correct in commenting that the asceticism of Kempis "was always too sombre for him." **

*Letters, Vol. I, May 28, 1725, P. 15.

**Rigg, Page 40.

The "Christian Pattern" presents the monastic life as the surest and best way to attain Christian perfection. It represents the best expression of the Catholic devotional life of the Middle Ages, but as we have seen, Wesley reacted against its extreme asceticism. This does not obviate the fact that the book influenced him profoundly. It did. He reread it again and again. Later he translated and published an edition himself and required his preachers to read it. It influenced Wesley to take religion more seriously, to give Christ the chief place in life. Perhaps it was influential in persuading him to make the usages and faith of the primitive church the norm of Christianity. Of its effect upon him,he himself wrotes: "When I was about twenty-two my father persuaded me to enter into Holy Orders. At the same time, the providence of God directing me to Kempis' Christian Pattern, I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. I was, however, angry at Kempis for being

*Overton, P. 13.

too strict, though I read him only in Dean Stanhope's translation. Meeting likewise with a religious friend, which I never had until now, I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement; I communicated every week; I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and to pray for, inward holiness." *

This statement shows the effect the book had upon him. But at this time we miss the real inner life that characterized the Wesley of later years. His religion is a form rather than a life, a quest rather than a possession. It is worthy of note here that the "religious friend" mentioned here was Miss Betty Kirkham. In a letter to his brother dated June 18, 1725, there is a reference to a "person of good judgment" in connection with Saylor's Holy Living and Dying. The person referred to in both instances is the same. We know little about Miss Kirkham, but our natural inference is that she was high in John Wesley's regard

*Overton, P. 13.

at this time, and deeply influenced him in the direction of a deeper religious life.

Taylor's Holy Living and Dying.

The next book of importance which Wesley read in 1725 is Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. We find him writing his mother regarding this book on June 18, 1725.* He criticises it, and then asks her advice about his attitude. The thing in particular that Wesley attacks in this letter is the idea that a person may expect no assurance of salvation. He reacted against the doctrine that we cannot know we are pardoned. Wesley argues that "if we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us, which he will not do until we are regenerated, certainly we must be sensible of it." He goes on to add that he had held to the idea that when he "communicated worthily" his sins were ipso facto forgiven." In conclusion he says, "if we have no certainty of our being in a state of salvation....we are of all men most miserable. God

*Vol. I, Letters, P. 20.

deliver us from such a fearful expectation as this!" Here we see Wesley's high church conception of the efficacy of the sacrement, but more important his reaction to Taylor in favor of an assurance of salvation. Wesley never receded from this position but he did develop the idea of assurance into the "witness of the spirit," a doctrine emphasized in later Methodist preaching.

In a letter to his mother dated July 29, 1725, Wesley again finds fault with Taylor's conception of humility.* This letter is interesting because Wesley airs his views here on several matters of faith. He bases the assurance of salvation in one's own faith in the Bible and sincerity, rather than in t the witness of the spirit. "I am persuaded we may know if we are now in a state of salvation, since that is expressly promised in the Holy Scriptures, to our sincere endeavors, and we are surely able to judge of our own sincerity." He here gives his definition of faith which is "an assent to any truth upon rational grounds," a definition having little in common with his conception of "saving faith" in later years. In

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 22.

this letter, too, he reacts strongly against the doctrine of "predestination." The idea is utterly repugnant to him. He reasons it out in its simplest and inevitable form and then asks, "How is this consistent with either Divine Justice or mercy? Is it merciful to ordain a creature to everlasting misery? Is it just to punish man for crimes which he could not commit? How is man, if necessarily determined, a free agent?" Searching questions, these, that suggest Wesley's sentiments, not only at the time, but all through his ministry, toward the "Horrible Decree."

The two books already mentioned sowed the seeds in Wesley's mind which later developed into the doctrine of "Christian Perfection." Wesley himself says, "I saw that simplicity of intention and purity of affection....one design in all we speak and do, and one desire ruling all our tempers....are indeed the wings of the soul without which she can never ascend to God. I sought after this from that hour."* The effect of Taylor's book was similar. Of its effect Wesley has this to say, "Instantly, I resolved to dedicate my life to God...all my thoughts and words and actions...

*Wesley's Works, Vol. III, P. 202.

being thoroughly convinced there was no medium, but that every part of my life, (not some only), must either be a sacrifice to God or myself, that is, the devil."* Added to these influences in developing this important doctrine I would add Wesley's own thoroughness. It was utterly against his nature to do anything half-heartedly or half-way; it must be all or nothing. Is it any wonder, then, that he took his religion seriously and developed such a doctrine as Christian Perfection? It fits Wesley's character exactly. I think it may be shown that this Wesleyan habit of doing everything thoroughly and going into everything wholeheartedly is a very suggestive explanation of much of his life and work.

Taylor's book influenced Wesley toward a more rigorous self-discipline. The message of the book may be condensed into the statement that moral strenuousness of life, rigid religious discipline, is the best way of holiness and the real heart of Christianity. Much of Wesley's asceticism was obtained from this source. As has been indicated, he immediately

*Ibid, Vol. XI, P. 351.

set out to live religion in earnest. Strict rules were laid down for his action. He became a Method--ist in earnest in his attempt to experience the real meaning of Christianity.

Thus, in this crucial year of 1725 John Wesley asked and answered, at least in part, two important questions. The first was, What shall I do with my life? He answered it by taking Holy Orders and preaching his first sermon at South Leigh in September. The second question was more fundamental and not so easily answered. It was, What is true Christianity? How may one experience it? The answer was not really to be found to this question for some thirteen years, but a temporary answer had been found, that was to prove unsatisfactory, in rigid religious discipline and moral strenuousness of life. Partly, too, the answer was contained, he thought, in a high churchly conception of the ministry and function of the church. The next years we will follow Wesley down a narrow way to the conclusion that Christianity is more than rules and sacraments... it is life. But for the present he is a religious

Sir Galahad in search of the Holy Grail. It is a splendid commentary upon Wesley that he should be motivated to make such a magnificent quest. He did not have the originality to pursue the search successfully by himself, but he did have the willingness to learn and the desire to be taught....almost, if not quite, as good...and the good judgment to know it when it was finally presented to him.

CHAPTER V.

MARKING TIME.

In March, 1726, Wesley was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. It was quite an honor, and of course gave great satisfaction to his father. It is a tribute to the scholarship of Wesley at Christ Church, and an insight into the regard held for him by the faculty of the university. The Fellowship carried an income with it of about forty pounds a year, which lifted him above the dire poverty that had been his before. That this income, which was dependent upon his remaining single, influenced him in refusing marriage, there is little doubt. Wesley secured a vacation from his college and spent the summer of 1726 with his family at Epworth. But the fall found him back in Lincoln ready to take up his duties as Fellow.

When Wesley took up his scholastic work at Lincoln he did it with the thoroughness and industry characteristic of him. In a letter to his brother

Samuel, dated December 5, 1726, there occurs the famous statement "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another: I propose to be as busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged to me." A schedule of work was laid down for every day which he rigorously adhered to. His studiousness and scholarship at Lincoln were soon recognized. He took his M.A. on February 14, 1727. While Wesley's program of work indicates how he still loved to read secular works, a bent toward asceticism is manifested in his social life. He took the opportunity, moving to a new college afforded him of denying himself of any frivolous or uncongenial companions whose influence was likely to be detrimental to his religious regimen. He repelled the advances of those who would be friendly, and deliberately ostracized himself from the college life. "I resolved to have only such acquaintances as would help me on my way to heaven."* If any called on him he refused to return the call, so gradually he was left pretty well alone. But even this secluded life at Lincoln hardly satisfied the monastic tendency that was in the ascendancy

*Wesley's Works, Vol. VI., P. 447. Quoted by Tyerman, P.55.

at the moment,for his letter to his mother dated March 19, 1727, tells of the offer of a Yorkshire school that was tempting because of its seclusion, a place where one can "expect little company from without, and within none at all." It is certain that Wesley was strongly influenced by the monastic ideal at this time, and only his saving common sense prevented him from becoming an utter recluse or religious hermit.

In 1726 Wesley read another book that had some influence upon his life, namely, Christian Perfection," by William Law, a non-juror with a strong ascetic bent. He wrote another book, "Serious Call" which Wesley read about this time or a little later. The first was published in 1726. As Tyerman sums it up, his "Christian Perfection" maintained "that Christianity requires a change of nature, a renunciation of the world, and worldly tempers, self-denial and mortification, in short, a life perfectly devoted to the service of God."* Clergymen are urged to devote their time to helping the needy rather than reading secular literature. The book was really a clear call to take religion seriously

*Tyerman, Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, Vol. I, P. 51.

in an age that commonly made it only a veneer. Wesley read it with heart aflame and felt himself in harmony with its message, though he rejected parts of its doctrine. He himself said, "But meeting now with Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call, although I was much offended any many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, resolved, as I had never done before, not to prolong the time of obeying Him. And by my continued endeavor to keep His whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted by Him, and that even then I was in a state of salvation."* This quotation shows how profoundly Law's books influenced Wesley, and what an impetus it gave to the doctrine of Christian Perfection. He says again of the effect they produced upon him, "I was convinced more than ever of the impossibility of being a half-Christian, and determined to be all devoted to God, to give Him all my

*Wesley's Works, Vol. I, P. 93.

soul, my body, and my substance."* Law contributed much of the asceticism Wesley manifested through the following years, though one must admit his suggestions in that direction fell upon fallow soil. Later, we shall have occasion to introduce Law again as he became the personal spiritual advisor and father confessor of Wesley in 1732, and continued so for several years.

From October 1726 to August 1727 Wesley was at Lincoln carrying on his duties with all the industry characteristic of him. On the latter date Wesley went to Wroote to be his father's curate and take some of the burden from the elderly man's stooping shoulders. This place was secluded enough and Wesley gave himself to his duties whole heartedly, but apparently little was accomplished. He was not the flame of evangelical zeal of later years. He reports that "he took some pains with his people," and his father testifies to the "dear love they bore him," but there is nothing outstanding at all during this period. He carried out his duties perfunctorily, but he was too engrossed in saving his own soul to do much for the

*Wesley's Works, Vol. XI, P. 352.

people. It has been suggested that his sermons were too high for the people. Overton says of him at this time, "He was simply a high and dry churchman of the old school."* He no doubt felt some satisfaction in helping his father, but that was about all, and no doubt he was glad to receive Dr. Morley's call to return to Lincoln. He took up his residence there again in November, 1729, and renewed his duties as Fellow. The work of Wroote did not give much promise of the work to be done in the future.

The period between 1726 and his return to Lincoln from Wroote in 1729 is sterile as far as any new developments in his religious are concerned. There are very few letters preserved from these years, and no other work to indicate his opinion about religion. We take it for granted that no great changes had taken place. Perhaps the flame burned lower at Wroote than at Oxford. Perhaps a certain reaction had set in. At least he had reached a plateau in his development, and was to climb no higher for the moment.

There is indeed a change in his thinking about

*John Wesley, P. 22.

faith that is recorded in his letter to his mother, November 22, 1725.* He had formerly defined faith as right opinion but now he says, "I have at length come over entirely to your opinion, that saving faith (including practice) is an assent to what God has revealed because he has revealed it and not because the truth of it may be evinced by reason." This may have been a step nearer the evangelical faith of the Methodists, but it was not a very long one. A rather peculiar attitude is brought out in a letter to his brother Samuel, December 5, 1726, regarding Jesus' precepts and example. He says, "Where Jesus exerts his authority against His opposers I cannot think it safe for me to follow Him. I would much sooner in these cases, act by His precepts than example. The one was certainly designed for me, the other possibly was not." This at least shows a critical attitude in the interpretation of the Bible.

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 25.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OXFORD METHODISTS.

LINCOLN COLLEGE, 1729-1735.

When John Wesley returned to Lincoln in 1729 to take up his duties he was destined to remain there until 1735, during which period important events were to take place. Wesley found the little club, that was to become so famous, already started at Christ Church when he returned to Lincoln. Charles Wesley had prepared at Westminster and entered Christ Church about the same time that John had left it for Lincoln. At first Charles was not very religious but the necessity of serious study and thought had sobered him into a deeply religious mood. His letters show him to be thoughtful and religious. In the spring of 1729 he was the means of rescuing Robert Morgan from bad associates and these two, with one or two other friends, associated themselves together in order to lead a more strict and orderly life. Their intimacy and methodistic behavior soon attracted attention among the students who were generally loose in their living,and irreligious.

A Christ Church undergraduate dubbed them "Methodists" because of their ordered discipline of life, and the name was destined to stick. John Wesley dated the origin of the Methodists from 1729, when this little group was organized by Charles Wesley. When Wesley joined them on his return to Lincoln College his age and ability immediately placed him in a position of leadership, which was at once recognized. They met mostly in his room. At first they met only once a week, then twice, and then they met every evening. Morgan and Robert Kirkham, with the two Wesley's made up the original group, but the number grew and varied after the first months. There were about twenty-nine at one time, but when Wesley left Oxford in 1735 there were only fourteen.

There are a few observations about the"Holy Club" that are pertinent here. In the first place, it was not strictly a religious club. Divinity was discussed on Sunday evening and the classics the other evenings of the week. It is correct to believe that religious interests were the main bonds of union, however, and that the discussion of religion and of moral problems became increasingly important

amd common at their meetings. The club was really a reaction on the part of some clear thinking and serious minded young men against the frivolity and immorality characteristic of Oxford at this time. It was a mutual benefit society existing for the purpose of taking advantage of their opportunities at the university to acquire an education and, religiously, to save their own souls.

The charity work was introduced in 1730 by Robert Morgan who had visited the "Castle" and had spoken to the prisoners. Feeling that they had been benefitted, he went again, and finally persuaded the Wesley's to accompany him. This work broadened out until it included the education of the poor children, financial relief for the smaller debtors, services in the "Castle" for the prisoners, and other forms of charitable activity. Permission from the proper authorities was secured for these works. Wesley, hesitant about doing something new, asked advice of his father, who encouraged him to continue their benevolent work with the words, "Go on, then, in God's name, in the path to which your Saviour has directed you, and that track wherein

your father has gone before you." * It might be said here that these charitable activities instituted by Morgan had a very salutary effect upon the members of the "Holy Club," particularly upon John Wesley, because it helped to take their minds off their own salvation, and center it in others. Their whole aim had been too selfish, formerly, but now it broadened out somewhat, though we are to remember that even this charitable work was undertaken as a means of personal salvation. The social emphasis begun here persisted throughout Wesley's life, and indeed, has been a characteristic of Methodism to this day. Those were significant developments at Oxford which had far reaching implications.

Social Life.

During this period at Lincoln there occurred the friendship with Betty Kirkham and Mrs. Pendarves, afterwards Mrs. Delaney. Quite a number of letters in the correspondence has been preserved. Miss Kirkham was the sister of Robert Kirkham, Wesley's chum, while Mrs. Pendarves was a close friend

*Winchester, Life of John Wesley, P. 29.

of the Kirkhams. Wesley seems to have been in love with Betty Kirkham, and contemplated marriage, but the four year correspondence came to an end in 1731, due to Wesley's first faux paux in his relations to women. Mrs. Pendarves, a brilliant and fashionable lady of court, took up the correspondence and place of Miss Kirkham in Wesley's life, and a courtly series of letters followed which finally came to an end in 1732. The significance of this correspondence is simply that it shows Wesley had a propensity for the opposite sex, and was far from being so shut up with religion that he had no time for pleasant female company or correspondence. One becomes infuriated with his management of his love affairs, and is forced to the conclusion that this represents in him a pitiable and lamentable weakness. Winchester, speaking of the correspondence with Mrs. Pendarves, well remarks that "the episode, however explained, obviously proves that the earnestness of his life had not blinded him to the charms of society, especially when illustrated in an accomplished woman." *

*Quoted by Winchester, Life of John Wesley, P. 37.

These years at Oxford, with a sufficient income for his needs, congenial friends, unhindered devotion to the classics, and pursuit of religion in such a beautiful and classical setting were some of the happiest of his life. Long, long afterwards he said, in a letter to his brother Charles, "I often cry out, Vitae me redde priori; let me again be an Oxford Methodist." One must not get the idea, however, that the Oxford Club had an easy time of it as far as the other members of the university were concerned. They were criticized, ridiculed, held in contempt, and otherwise scornfully treated. On October 18, 1732, Wesley wrote to Richard Morgan defending the Club and its practices. In this letter he gives some queries he had written in defense of the charitable activities. * There was no answer, nor indeed is there an answer to them. They may be summed up in the first question. He asks, "Whether it does not concern all men of all conditions to imitate Him, as much as they can, 'who went about doing good?'" Personal criticisms and persecutions Wesley came to believe were a "salutary stimulus to fidelity."

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 128.

Wesley was consistent throughout his career in holding to the position that adversity is more favorable to the development of holiness than prosperity. Persecution was a blessing, not a curse; an aid to religion, not a hindrance. Expression of this notion occurs frequently throughout his "Letters." In a letter to his father dated December 10, 1734, he takes the strong position that every true Christian is, as his Master was, held in contempt by the non-Christian, and that criticism and persecution constitute a part of the cross each Christian must expect to bear. After giving reasons for his position he says, "I must therefore keep close to my Saviours judgment, and maintain that contempt is a part of the cross that every man must bear if he would follow Him; that it is his badge of discipleship, the stamp of his profession, the constant seal of his calling; insomuch that, though a man may be despised without being saved, yet he cannot be saved without being despised."* In the same letter he remarks that contempt "is a necessary means of purifying souls for heaven...as it is

*Ibid, P. 176.

one of the choicest remedies in the whole magazine of God against love of the world, in which whosoever liveth is counted dead before Him." He goes on to add "that our being contemned is absolutely necessary to our doing good in the world." This position was no doubt partly caused by the uncalled for criticism to which they were subjected, and to the asceticism which he had imbibed. It smacks of Kempis. But be that as it may, it is a position he held throughout his life.

The Call to Epworth.

By 1734 Samuel Wesley was getting old, and with his health failing he began to look about for some one to succeed him at Epworth who would conserve the fruit of his labors. The decision finally rested upon John who was urged to leave Oxford and take the parish. All the family apparently attempted to persuade Wesley it was the thing to do, but he remained obdurate and defended his refusal in characteristic fashion. In a letter to his father, dated December 10, 1734, he gives twenty-six reasons why he cannot go to Epworth. *

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 166.

They are obviously selfish reasons based upon the idea that Oxford is a more likely place to save his own soul. He does add that he believes the holier he is the better able he will be to promote holiness in others. In the light of what followed it would have been unfortunate had Wesley yielded and left Oxford, as he did reluctantly consent to do after it was too late to secure the living. But his reasons for not going give us an insight into Wesley's religious life at the time. He was engrossed with the idea of saving his own soul. This he was attempting to do by the use of the instituted means of grace in the church, charitable activities, and rigorous self-discipline of life. His religious life was unsettled and uncertain. There was a dissatisfaction with his religious experience discernible in the tone of his letters. He was becoming ripe for a reinterpretation of Christianity in terms of the inner life.

CHAPTER VII.

INFLUENCES AND TENDENCIES DURING THE LATER YEARS AT OXFORD.

William Law.

In 1732 John Wesley had occasion to visit William Law at Putney where he was engaged as tutor in the Gibbon family. He had become acquainted with Law several years previously by reading his two books, "Serious Call" and"Christian Perfection" which had had a marked influence upon him. Wesley's purpose on this visit was for religious guidance as were several more calls that he made at Putney. Law exercised quite an influence upon Wesley in the direction of the inner life and the development of his doctrine of Christian Perfection, but after a friendship of several years, the relationship was broken because Law went off into an extravagant mysticism, and particularly because Wesley roundly upbraided him for not teaching him about saving faith. As Winchester says, Law's

works "greatly deepened Wesley's sense of the possibilities and obligations of the religious life." He himself says, "A contemplative man," referring to Law, "convinced me still more than I was convinced before, that outward works are nothing, being alone; and in several conversations, instructed me how to pursue inward holiness, or a union of the soul with God."* Wesley then says that really it was an encouragement not to do outward works at all, and that Law's program really called for self-righteousness as much as the way he had been pursuing.. Law was no doubt an antidote to Wesley's excessive high churchly ideas, but this contribution is offset by his influence in the direction of asceticism and isolation. Rigg remarks that Law helped save Wesley, too, from an "excessive traditionalism" into which Wesley had now fallen.** It was Law who recommended the "Theologica Germanica" and Tauler's and Molino's works, and other mystical writings. It was in these years that Wesley read "The Life of God in the Soul of Man" by Scoubel, and some writings of Francke who

*Works, Vol. I, P. 100.

**Rigg, The Living Wesley, P. 68.

introduced him to the Halle mysticism.

Mysticism.

Wesley was much inclined toward mysticism through this period, and under the influence of Law and others, embraced much of it. Perhaps his saving common sense saved him, for in Georgia we find the reaction has set in and at that time he was an inveterate enemy of mysticism as he knew it. Writing from Georgia to his brother Samuel, November 23, 1736, he says, "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace."* His high churchmanship had triumphed over the passive method of the mystics. He saw the fatal defects of mysticism as a quotation will reveal. Incidentally, it also shows Wesley's attitude toward tradition. Speaking of this period, he says later, "I bent the bow too far in that direction, by making antiquity a coordinate, rather than subordinate rule with Scrip-

*Letters, Vol. I, *. 207.

ture; by admitting several doubtful writings; by extending antiquity too far; by believing more practices to have been universal in the ancient church than ever were so; that most of the decrees of the provincial synod were adapted to particular times and occasions. These considerations insensibly stole upon me as I grew acquainted with the mystic writers, whose noble descriptions of reunion with God, and internal religion, made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid. But, in truth, they make good works appear so too."* The last sentence shows why Wesley rejected mysticism. It simply ran counter to his common sense and high church notions of the value of instituted means of grace. It is probable, however, that mysticism did open Wesley's mind to the possibility and desirability of a vital religious experience that later found its fruition in his life and in the lives of countless Methodists.

Christian Perfection.

Wesley almost fully developed his doctrine

*Southey's Wesley, Vol. II, P. 94.

of Christian Perfection during this period. This he interpreted as love of God and man or the realization of the two chief commandments given by Jesus. The subject appears often in his letters. In a letter to Mrs. Pendarves he makes a statement of his views that is very enlightening, both as to his ideas on holiness, and the church.* "I was made to be happy; to be happy I must love God; in proportion to my love of whom my happiness must increase. To love God I must be like Him, holy as He is holy; which implies both the being pure from vicious and foolish passions, and the being confirmed in those virtuous and rational affections which God comprises in the word charity. In order to root these out of my soul and plant these in their stead, I must use such means as are ordered of God, and such as are recommended by experience and reason." This shows both the end to be attained and the means to attain it. In a letter to Ann Granville, October 3, 1731, more light is thrown upon his idea of perfection, when he makes such statements as, "to know that our hope is sincerity, not perfection; not to do well,

*Letters, Vol. I, (July 17, 1731), P. 92.

but to do our best." And a letter later, "perfect, indeed, he was from sin, strictly speaking, which is a voluntary breach of a known law."* And in a letter to his father, December 10, 1734, he defines what he means by holiness. "By holiness I mean not fasting, or bodily austerity, or any other external means of improvement, but the inward temper, to which all these are subservient, a renewal of the soul in the image of God. I mean a complex habit of lowliness, meekness, purity, faith, hope, and the love of God and man."** This was certainly a splendid ideal for which to strive, and John Wesley, though he had not arrived, still pursued all the strenuousness with which he was able, the ideal by the use of the means of grace and good works, the best method he then knew. This doctrine and Wesley's attempt to realize it in life should be sufficient commentary upon the question of whether he was a Christian at the time. He had not, it is true, the inner experience which afforded him so much satisfaction in after years, but the moral and religious tone of his life was utterly Christian and in a profound sense.

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 111.

**Ibid, P. 168.

Theological Doctrines.

During this period Wesley developed into practically mature form nearly all of the doctrines he later preached. The formal doctrines were there but they were as dry bones without power. The tone of the letters is utterly unevangelical. The ideal was fine, but the means to attain it....the use of the church and its ordinances, plus good works....failed him and left him disillusioned and dissatisfied. As Rigg says of this period, "Of Christ and faith there is nothing. A servile legalism...a plodding ritualism, which the performer must have continually felt to be liable to degenerate into perfunctoriness...constitutes the whole way of salvation."* He was tempted by mysticism, wavered between it and High Churchmanship, finally rejected the former, but remained dissatisfied with the latter. His soul is laid open in his own words, "Though I could never fully come into this, (mysticism), nor contentedly omit what God enjoined, yet, I know not how, I fluc-

*The Living Wesley, P. 64.

tuated between obedience and disobedience. I had no heart, no vigour, no zeal in obeying, continually doubting whether I was right or wrong, and never out of perplexities and entanglements. Nor can I at this hour give a distinct account of how I came back a little toward the right way; only my present sense in this...all the other enemies of Christianity are but triflers; the mystics are the most dangerous; they stab it in the vitals, and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them."* Perhaps the experience with mysticism was valuable after all, for Wesley took the better elements of both views and combined them into a dynamic Methodism. Wesley, at Oxford, investigated and experimented with many angles of Christian experience and doctrine that at least helped to separate the chaff from the wheat.

Wesley's high conception of real religion is given in a letter to Richard Morgan, dated January 15, 1734, in which he says, "Let us first agree what religion is. I take religion to be, not the bare saying over of so many prayers; not anything super-

*Works, Vol. I, P. 100.

added now and then to a careless or worldly life; but a constant ruling habit of the soul, a renewal of our minds in the image of God, a recovery of the divine likeness, a still increasing conformity of heart and life to the pattern of our most holy Redeemer."* A noble conception, too high to be attained by the only method he knew. It would almost drive a person to despair. But of that saving faith and personal experience of Christ we hear nothing during this pe iod. However, it has prepared in John Wesley's heart fallow soil for the seed of the evangelical gospel.

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 152.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGIA AND THE MORAVIANS.

Historical Sketch.

In 1735 General James Oglethorpe was in England securing additional aid and personell for the colony he had planted in Georgia in 1732. It was a philanthropic enterprise and had the backing of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Oglethorpe was looking for an ordained and able minister who would go with him to act in the double capacity of chaplain to the English people at Savannah, and as missionary to the Indians. Wesley was recommended to him for this position by a Dr. Burton of Corpua Christi College, Oxford, and inasmuch as Oglethorpe was acquainted with the family at Epworth, and had been given a set of communion plate by John's brother Samuel, he listened with favor to the recommendation, and offered Wesley the place. Wesley at first refused, but upon being urged to reconsider, gave

more thought to the proposition and also sought the advice of his friends. One reason why he was reluctant to go was on account of his widowed mother, but she removed that difficulty by giving her willing consent in the heroic and famous words, "Had I twenty sons I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more."* This settled the matter and Wesley resolved to go... a decision that had far-reaching consequences. Wesley was to receive fifty pounds a year. At the last moment Charles Wesley decided to go along as Oglethorpe's secretary. Benjamin Ingham, an Oxford Methodist, and Charles Delamotte, son of a London merchant, "who had a mind to leave the world, and give himself up entirely to God," also went along. This little group formed, on board ship, a little club, by a signed compact, on the model of the Oxford Club. They laid down a systematic routine of work for the days on board, and agreed they would consult together about any decision to be made. The majority was to rule, but in case of a tie vote the issue was to be decided by lot.

*Overton, John Wesley, P. 46.

Wesley was to be away from England almost two and a half years, on what, from one standpoint, turned out to be a fruitless errand. He began his work immediately he landed in Savannah and carried it on very faithfully as far as his conception of his duties went. But the ignorant and sinful people, combined with Wesley's impossible demands, made him personally quite unpopular, and his work comparatively unsuccessful. The Indians were not evangelized because of two good reasons: First, Wesley had no opportunity to preach to them, and secondly, they had no desire to become Christians, nor time to listen to his teachings, even if he had had the time. Added to these things Wesley fell in love with Miss Sophia Hopkey, but weakly listening to the ill-timed advice of his friends, decided at the last moment not to marry her. This debacle resulted in her marriage to Williamson. Wesley's refusal to administer the sacrament to her after her marriage resulted in a law suit against him which created an unpleasant scandal, and ended his usefulness in Georgia. Recognizing this, Wesley re-

turned to England in a state of mind ill calculated to do anything of great moment. This short sketch of the obvious course of events in Georgia will suffice for our purpose.

The real important of the Georgia experience is to be found in the evolution of Wesley's inner life. There are several questions in regard to this that will be profitable to ask and answer. What was his purpose in going to Georgia? What influence did he come into contact with of any moment? What was Wesley's own attitude and doctrine during this period? What was his state of mind upon leaving Georgia? The "Letters" and the "Journal" both throw much light upon the inner life of Wesley. In them we may trace the history of his spiritual life.

The Motive?

The first question has to do with Wesley's motive in going to Georgia. The answer is not hard to find. It is the same motive that was back of his Oxford religious activities, namely, it was to save his own soul. Coupled with this was the desire and hope that he might learn the true nature of

Christianity by preaching the Gospel to the Indians. On Tuesday, October 14, 1735, there is this entry in his Journal, "Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want, nor to gain the dung or dross of riches or honour; but simply this...to save our own souls; to live wholly to the glory of God."* It was the same motive that would impel one to enter a monastery and practically the same method was involved, isolation. In a letter to Dr. John Burton, dated October 10, 1735, Wesley gives the same motive set down in his Journal: "My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul."** He then states his reasons why this end should be feasible. In the same letter he goes on to say that he believes that if he himself is converted the Lord will use him more effectively in saving others. But it is clear that he considers himself outside the pale of Christianity, and a seeker for salvation. It is a very illuminating paragraph which says, "I hope to know what it is to lovemy neighbor as myself, and to feel the powers

*The Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 3.

**Letters, Vol. I, P. 188.

of that second motive to visit the heathen...a saving knowledge of the Gospel of Christ. But this I dare not think on yet. It is not for me, who has been a grevious sinner from my youth up, and am yet laden with foolish and hurtful desires, to expect God should work so great things by my hands; but I am assured, if I be once fully converted myself, He will then employ me both to strengthen my brethren and to preach His name to the Gentiles, that the very ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God."*

The term "second motive" would seem to imply that Wesley felt that he had been acting more from a sense of formal duty than from an impelling love. The expression "fully converted" also suggests that he could not think of himself as totally un-Christian, but only as lacking the inner satisfaction and life which real Christianity afforded We find, then, that Wesley went to Georgia with a sense of dissatisfaction and acutely conscious that moral strenuousness, means of grace, and good works, however carried on, alone and unaided by an inner dynamic, were unsatisfactory. They were beginning to prove dry and bitter in his mouth.

*Ibid, P. 188.

Wesley's typically Eighteenth Century conception of the Indian in his native state is interesting. He feels that the subtle reasoning of the civilized mind has covered the true nature of Christianity with a fog, and that the simply and untutored mind of the savage will enable him to recover the simplicity and radiance of primitive Christianity. He says in the letter to Dr. Burton just quoted, "I hope to learn the true sense of the Gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen. They have no comments to construe away the text; no luxurious sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths, to reconcile earthly-mindedness and faith, the Spirit of Christ, and the spirit of the world. They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God; and consequently they shall know of every doctrine I preach whether it be of God. By these, therefore, I hope to learn the purity of the faith which was once delivered to the saints; the genuine sense and full extent of those laws which none can understand who mind earthly things."*

*Ibid, P. 188.

Wesley was, of course, soon disillusioned about the character of the Indian, and left Georgia with a totally different conception of a savage in the primitive state. But how this letter shows forth Wesley's reaction to the superficial religion of Oxford and England at the time! How illuminating is it as to the real aspiration of Wesley's mind and heart! He is seeking the true nature of Christianity as revealed in its pristine purity. With this, of course, goes the salvation of his own soul. Sir Galahad is still searching, disappointed, but not discouraged, for the Holy Grail.

In a letter to his brother Samuel, written on board the Simmonds, and dated October 15, 1735, we find a fine statement that has an evangelical tone. It is in the form of a bit of advice that is almost a command. "You are to labour with all your might to convince them (the children at Tiverton) that Christianity is not a negation or an external thing, but a new heart, a mind conformed to that of Christ, faith working by love." Wesley seemed to have had a fairly good intellectual conception of Christianity as a heart religion, but when it came down to life he

*Ibid, P. 188.

did not know how, why, or what he was to experience. He was lost in a fog and bewildered. He could neither experience it himself or lead anyone else into the experience.

The Moravians.

The second question has to do with the influences that affected Wesley during this period. We have in mind the Moravians. On the ship there was a company of twenty-six Moravians, going out with their Bishop, David Nitschmann, to join a number of their own faith who had already settled in Georgia. They represented the type of European pietism that had sprung up in the Holland at Herrnhut, under Count Zinzendorf, who magnified justification by faith and attempted to emulate the simplicity of the primitive church. Ingham describes them as follows:* "They are a good, devout, peaceable, and heavenly-minded people. Their example was very edifying. They are more like the primitive Christians than any church now existing, for they retain both the faith, practice, and discipline delivered by the Apostles.

*Quoted by Tyerman, Life and Times of John Wesley, P. 121.

They all submit themselves to their pastor in everything. They live together in perfect love and peace....In everything they behave themselves with meekness, sweetness, and humility." This may be taken as the impression the Moravians made upon Wesley and the others of his group.

The life on board ship was well calculated to test the religion of anyone. The motley crowd and the terrific storms both had something to do with bringing Wesley to contrast his religion with that of the Moravians, to the embarrassment of the former. Wesley was early attracted to the Moravians by their humn singing, simplicity, and their willingness to do the most menial tasks cheerfully. He joined them in their public worship and set himself to learn the German language that he might converse with them. As Winchester says, "Wesley saw in them a deep and quiet faith, an undisturbed serenity of spirit, such as he coveted but could not attain."*

The ship encountered some storms that tried Wesley's faith, and we find such entries as these in his Journal: "Sun. 23...At night I was awakened

*Winchester, Life of John Wesley, P. 43.

by the tossing of the ship and roaring of the wind, and plainly showed I was unfit, for I was unwilling to die. Sat. 17....About eleven I lay down... and in a short time fell asleep, though very uncertain whether I should wake alive, and much ashamed of my unwillingness to die. Friday 23....I could not but say to myself, 'how is it that thou hast no faith?' being still unwilling to die."* These quotations will show how Wesley, whether right or wrong, tested his Christianity by his willingness to die. In contrast to this, the entry on Sunday the 25th tells of a great wave breaking over the sea and doing a bit of damage while they were engaged in singing a Psalm. "A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'were you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'but were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No, our women and children are not afraid to die.'" ** Wesley felt that these people had something he lacked, and that it was the thing for which he had been seeking.

*The Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 5.

**Ibid, P. 7.

When the ship reached Savannah Wesley asked some advice from one of the Moravian pastors by the name of Spangenburg, who immediately began to ask him some rather sharp questions about himself. As Wesley records it in his Journal,"'Have you the witness within yourself?' I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' I paused, and said, 'I know he is the Saviour of the world.' 'True,' replied he, 'but do you know he has saved you?' I answered, 'I hope he has died to save me.' He only added, 'Do you know yourself?' I said, 'I do.' But I fear they were vain words." * Wesley really felt that he was a Christian after a fashion, and was no doubt sincere in his reply. On the other hand, the comment about his words being "vain" was also true because he was conscious of a fundamental lack in his religious life.

Throughout the Georgia period Wesley fraternized with, and observed, the Moravians. On March 15, 1736, he wrote to Zinzendorf asking that he be prayed for. He attended the ceremony accompanying the ordination of one of their bishops and the sim-

*Ibid, P. 8.

plicity and solemnity of the occasion made him imagine he was back in the primitive church with Peter and Paul. The Moravians revealed to Wesley a hitherto unknown aspect of religion, and set his heart hungering for it.

The Dissatisfied High Churchman.

What was Wesley's own experience, practice, and doctrine while In Georgia? His inner life was characterized by a sense of lack and dissatisfaction. He felt himself unconverted. But to offset this, he set about his duties with such vigor, and practiced his high church notions so faithfully that he overdid it. His own people began to revel because he attempted to force them down their throats. He was an ecclesiastical autocrat in discipline and an absolute high churchman in his practices. The persecution visited upon him makes him say in a letter to James Hutton, June 16, 1737, "The little share of persecution which falls to me plainly shows I have no strength....Strive mightily with God, you and all your father's house, that I may not, when I have

preached to others, be myself a castaway."* We catch here a sight of Wesley's inner soul. He practiced the externals of religion with the desperation born of despair, but knew himself to lack the inner dynamic. It was no pleasant time for him. Combined with this was his love for, and loss of, Sophia Hopkey, which was in itself enough to unsettle a soul.

In Georgia, as we have already indicated, Wesley was an extreme high churchman. Everything was done to the letter of the law. His sacerdotalism and asceticism were in the saddle. He did, however, introduce hymn singing into the worship program, and on one occasion departed so far from the law of the church as to baptize an infant with only two sponsors present. He later admitted this was wrong, however, and repented. It is little wonder that Wesley provoked the ill will of the people, because his rigid practices smacked too much of tyranny and popery.

However, Wesley expressed some very fine views on some phases of religion while in Georgia. We have already noted how he reacted against mysti-

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 222.

cism while there. In a letter to William Wogan, March 28, 1737, he says, "I entirely agree with you that religion is love and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; that as it is the happiest, so it is the cheerfullest, thing in the world; that it is utterly inconsistent with moroseness, sourness, severity, and indeed with whatever is not according to the softness, sweetness, and gentleness of Jesus Christ. I believe it is equally contrary to all preciseness, stiffness, affectation, and unnecessary singularity."* This could scarcely be improved upon as an expression, but one wonders if they were not with him mere words.

Similar statements occur in a letter to Mrs. Chapman, written March 29, 1737. "I am convinced, as true religion or holiness cannot be without cheerfulness, so steady cheerfulness, on the other hand, cannot be without holiness or true religion, and I am equally convinced that true religion has nothing sour, austere, unsociable, unfriendly in it; but, on the contrary, implies the most winning sweetness, the most amiable softness and gentleness." ** I agree.

*Ibid, P. 217.

**Ibid, P. 218.

In the same letter, "There is one thing needful...to do the will of God; and His will is our sanctification; our renewal in the image of God, in faith and love, in all holiness and happiness."*

Despondency.

Our last question has to do with Wesley's state of mind at the time he left Georgia, and the results of his mission there. Whitefield and others have borne testimony that his work was not utterly futile, nor his personality totally unappreciated. We are acquainted with these statements. But obviously, the mission was a failure to the mind of Wesley. The discovery of his own spiritual lack; the inability to preach to, and disillusionment about, the Indians; the ill will of the majority of his parishoners; and finally, the fact that he had lost the woman he loved, and of being forced to leave because of a scandal that admittedly destroyed his usefulness, should, I think, be enough to make anyone admit

*Ibid, P. 219.

comparative failure. Wesley himself was ready to be honest about it. Nor is it strange that he should have been despondent on the voyage back to England. Who would not be under the circumstances? Wesley was human enough to be disappointed and blue. But for all this, he was not crushed, nor discouraged, and events were soon to prove of what heroic stuff he was made. He had been through the fire.

For all of the truth of the above we must assert that the Georgia mission was a huge success. It led to the discovery of the fountain that gushed forth to quench the spiritual thirst of millions of souls. Wesley had discovered his need and had some fairly clear ideas as to where to find the thing that would supply it. His contact with the Moravians and the clear sense of his own spiritual condition are the two great values the Georgia mission produced. I like the statement of John Telford, the able editor of the Standard Edition of the Letters, on this period. "The mission to Georgia had many painful experiences, but it played an important part in the training of Wesley. He came into contact with men

and women whose faith and courage made him conscious of his own spiritual need, and prepared the way for his emancipation from doubt and fear."*

As would be supposed, Wesley was in a state of despondency on the voyage home. The tedious hours on shipboard afforded ample time for introspection. Monday, January 2, there is this almost pathetic entry in his Journal, "Being sorrowful and very heavy..."** On Tuesday, the 24th, he says, "My mind was now full of thought; part of which I write down as follows: 'I went to America, to convert the Indian; but O! Who shall convert Me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of mischief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, To die is gain!....I think, verily, if the gospel be true, I am safe; for I follow after charity (though not as I ought, yet as I can), if haply I may attain it....whoever sees me sees I would be a Christian...But in a storm I thin, What if the Gospel be not true: O! Who will deliver me from the

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 230.

**Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 27.

fear of this death? What shall I do?'" This is the confession of a harrassed soul; there is almost a note of despair in it.

Wesley's own comment about the Georgia mission is given in the Journal. "It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, and in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, (what I least of all suspected), that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God. I am not mad, though I thus speak; but I speak the words of truth and soberness; if haply some of those who still dream may awake and see, that as I am, so are they."* Long after, Wesley added, "I am not sure of this" as a footnote to this. We may well admit that Wesley was deficient in one respect--that of inner life--but he was a Christian of a high order during the Georgia period.

*Ibid, P. 31.

CHAPTER IX.

CROSSING THE RUBICON.

Wesley landed at Deal on February 1, 1738, and immediately entered into one of the most critical perios of his entire life. Though disappointed with his Georgia mission, and perturbed and restless in his inner life, he started at once to preaching and exhorting at every opportunity. This fact itself serve to show the manly stuff out of which he was made. He went to London and turned over his report and commission to the Georgia trustee, and preached there as often as possible. During the three months he went to see his mother at Salisbury; to Tiverton to see his brother Samuel; to Manchester to see Clayton; to Oxford to see Charles Wesley, who was ill, and back again to London. It is almost impossible to trace in detail his journey through these weeks, nor is it necessary to do so. But we must note that his journal records many sermons and exhortations delivered at various places in his peregrinations.

What we are concerned about is Wesley's developing religious experience through these months to its important culmination in his evangelical conversion on May 24. In order to do this let us inquire, firstly, what was Wesley's conception of his own religious life at this time: Secondly, let us see what influence Peter Bohler had on him, and finally, let us consider the religious development culminating in his"heart being strangely warmed"and the significance of that event.

What was Wesley's conception of his own experience at the time? We have already suggested that Wesley viewed himself as a sinner and a non-Christian. It is made clear by many passages,both in the Journal and the Letters, that Wesley regarded himself as not being a Christian, but as earnestly seeking after it. In a letter to his brother Samuel, dated October 30, 1738, he plainly says, "By a Christian I mean one who so believes in Christ that sin hath no more dominion over him. And in this obvious sense of the word I was not a Christian till May 24th last past."* He goes on to record some observations he had written

*Letters, P. 238.

down on January 8, 1738, in which he says that "The most infallible of all proofs, inward feeling, I am convinced of unbelief, pride, fear in danger," and concludes, "Lord, save , or I perish! Save me!* The entry in the Journal for March 4 has this to testify to his condition: "I was on Sunday the 25th, clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of faith whereby alone we are saved." These quotations will suffice to show Wesley's state of mind regarding his own experience. It must be kept in mind that he was thinking of a particular type of conversion experience when he judged himself unconverted.

It is made equally clear that Wesley was earnestly seeking for some kind of satisfying experience at this time. He was eagerly looking for the way to a satisfactory inner life. To James Hutton he writes, "I preach it to all, that at length I might feel it."** In a letter dated May 24th, he says that he does not have the witness or assurance of salvation, and then prays that he might have it.***

*Ibid, P. 245.

**Ibid, P. 238.

***Ibid, P. 245.

Wesley, throughout this period, was conscious of a void in his religious life that he earnestly sought to fill. He felt himself unconverted and wanted to be, but hardly knew how to go about it. He felt that the Christianity he had known had failed to satisfy, so he was groping for a living faith that gave an assurance of salvation. Later, he differentiated by saying at this time he had the faith of a servant but not that of a son. He wanted the faith that none could have without being conscious of it.

Our second question deals with the part Peter Bohler had in the conversion of Wesley. On Tuesday, February 7, in Wesley's Journal, we read, "A day much to be remembered. I met Peter Bohler."* The Journal was to contain much of Peter Bohler the next few weeks. Bohler was a Moravian minister, graduate of Jeva, on his way to Georgia as a missionary, and stopping by England to visit the Moravians there. He was twenty-five at the time. Wesley had a high opinion of the Moravians, gained from the Georgia experience with them, and he immediately formed a friendship with Bohler, and was instrumental in securing lodgings in London for him. Wesley was

*Heart of Journal, P. 33,

much impressed with him and lost no opportunity of talking religion with this young Moravian. As it happened, Bohler was just the type of spiritual advisor that Wesley needed at the moment to lead him out of his despondency and fears. He and Bohler went together to Oxford, and later met there again when Charles Wesley was ill, at which time, Mary 4th, Wesley was convinced of unbelief. On March 23, they met again. On April 2nd, 26th, they are again together. On May 4th Bohler sailed for America. The day before, Wesley records that Charles Wesley was convinced by Bohler of the true nature of saving faith.

What new thing was it that Bohler taught Wesley? Wesley was already convinced of his need of faith, but did not know its exact nature, nor how to attain it. Bohler had some clear and definite teachings, which he imparted to Wesley, on saving or evangelical faith. There was nothing particularly in the Moravian's statement of the doctrine, but there was much new to Wesley in the tone and results, and way of actually realizing it. Bohler told Wesley that true faith was always attended by "dominion over sin, and constant peace,

arising from a sense of forgiveness."* This faith was the gift of God and was given instantaneously. These were hard sayings for Wesley to receive, but he was willing to learn and set out to verify them. To the law and to the testimony he went, and found his Greek testament did support the idea that saving faith was attended by "dominion over sin" and assurances of salvation.** But he still doubted whether it was an experience, whereupon Bohler produced three witnesses who testified to it. Wesley recognized his own need to have this type of faith that produced such fruit, but he had another objection.

The last objection Wesley made was to instantaneous conversion. He again consulted his testament and had to confess that to his "utter astonishment he found scarcely any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions, scarcely any so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth."*** Wesley then took the position that this instantaneous experience was peculiar to

*Tyerman, Life and Times of Wesley, P. 177.

**Heart of the Journal, P. 39.

***Rigg, The Living Wesley, P. 112.

Apostolic times and not to be expected today. Bohler was ready for this objection and refuted it by producing several people who professed an instantaneous conversion with all of its attendant fruits. This argument from experience convinced Wesley, and he admitted the truth of Bohler's position. He wrote, (April 23), "Here ended my disputing. I could now only cry out, Lord, help Thou mine unbelief. I was now thoroughly conviced; and, by the grace of God, I resolved to seek this faith unto the end.....(1) By absolutely renouncing all dependence upon my own works of righteousness; on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up. (2) By adding to the use of all the other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing--justifying faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.*

The doctrine, then, that Wesley learned from Bohler was simply the doctrine of justification by faith. This saving faith is not mere intellectual assent "but an experience, a confident personal

*Quoted by Tyerman, Life and Times of Wesley, P. 178.

reliance upon the divine goodness."* Such a faith carries its own assurance and sense of security. The witness of the spirit follows naturally such a warm, personal reliance upon God through Christ. That it is the gift of God and bestowed instantaneously may need some explanation. The human volition must have some part in it, as Bohler implies, when he urges Wesley to preach faith until he has it. That it is given instantaneously is true in one sense, and untrue in another aspect. Preparation must precede it, and yet one becomes conscious of its presence, to all intents and purposes, instantaneously. At least, it was the old doctrine of the Christian church that a person may have an experience of religion in the emotional life, and a present assurance of salvation that Wesley learned from Bohler.

We have intimated that Wesley was a willing learner from his spiritual advisor, Bohler, but all was not so easy as one might infer. His cool, logical, penetrating mind, stood in the way of jumping at conclusions. Bohler observed this and told him that his "philosophy must be purged away." But

*Winchester, Life of Wesley, P. 55.

after being convinced by Bohler that this experience had both the support of scripture and of experience, he made more progress. As we have seen, he set out immediately to find this experience for himself. But conscious of his lack of saving faith, he thought he should leave off preaching and wait for it. Bohler gave him then the famous bit of advice, "preach faith until you have it; and then because you have it you will preach faith."* "Accordingly," said Wesley, "I began preaching this new doctrine, though my soul started back from the work. The first person to whom I offered salvation by faith alone was a prisoner under sentence of death." That was a great step to take. Henceforth, Wesley's evangelical temper grew apace. He preached in season and out of season, with all the desperate earnestness of his seeking soul. It is to be feared that he did not always use good judgment in presenting it, for his Journal records church after church that was closed against him after a sermon on the subject. His friends and family warned him to be careful lest he go off into fanaticism, and, indeed, at one time they thought that he was a trifle mad. During this

*Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 57.

period he wrote William Law the censorious letters reproaching him for neglecting to inform him of the doctrine, and accusing Law of not being converted himself. Wesley was riding on the crest of a wave of excitement, for he was close to the end of his search for a vital, satisfying, religious experience.

Wesley sought for the experience long before he found it. On April 2 he writes, "I see the promise, but it is afar off."* On the next day he accepted an invitation from Mr. Kinchin to go to Benner in Hampshire, thinking to find the experience in "silence and retirement." On the 26th Bohler exhorted him "not to stop short of the grace of God." On May 20th, he received the "surprising" news that Charles "had found rest to his soul." On May 24th, John Wesley himself testifies to his own conversion. The Journal gives us his own description of it:

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's prefece to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which

*Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 40.

God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."*

The significance of that experience can be overestimated, but on the other hand, it can more easily be underestimated. It is worthy of note that Wesley ever after referred to it as a crucial and decisive experience in his life. It was his evangelical conversion and signified a great change in his inner life, and in his work as a preacher. Dr. Cell says that "Wesley,by that experience, crossed the dividing line between two great systems signified by the change of the date of his spiritual birthday from his baptism to his conversion."** The church as an institution of authority, ritual, self-discipline, had been his themes. Now he was to preach salvation through faith in Christ, domination over sin, and present assurance of acceptance with God. He was changed from a priest of the church to a flaming evangelist of an evangelical gospel. This does not mean, of course,

*Ibid, P. 43.

**Class Notes, Essentials of Methodism.

that Wesley instantly discarded all his former ideas and doctrines about the church. Rather, his emphasis was placed in a different place, namely, personal experimental salvation.

Wesley had found the assurance for which he had been looking so long. The perturbed, restless, soul was satisfied (as far as it could be) at last. Peace came. Henceforth he could go through the most terrifying experiences without fear. Finally, he was to die like a saint that he was, with the sublime words on his lips, "The best of all, God is with us." Sir Galahad had found the "Holy Grail." Caesar had crossed the Rubicon.

We may close this comment upon the significance of Wesley's experience by quoting Lecky, the great historian: "It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the scene which took place at the humble meeting in Aldersgate Street forms an epoch in English history. The conviction which then flashed upon one of the most powerful and active intellects in England is the true source of English Methodism. *

*W. E. H. Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century, Vol. III, Longman, Green, and Co., London, 1899.

PART III.

THE NEW MAN.

CHAPTER X.

FLUCTUATIONS.

We are not to suppose that Wesley had no doubtings or vacillations in his religious experience after his conversion. We find several indications recorded where he was tempted to doubt the validity of his conversion. The very night it happened he records that the enemy suggested, "This cannot be faith; for where is joy? Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the captain of our salvation, but transports of joy, God sometimes giveth, and sometimes withholdeth, according to the counsels of his own will."* His letters at this time usually close with a plea for prayer that he may be strengthened and established in the faith.

In a letter to Isaac Delong, November 22, 1738, we find him despondent and doubting: "I can't love anyone as I ought, because I can't love our blessed Lord. My heart is cold and senseless. It is, indeed, an heart of stone. Oh, when will He take it out of

*Heart of Wesley's Journal, P. 45.

me and give me a heart of flesh?"* The feeling had gone and had left him desolate. On the same day he says in another letters, "I am still dead and cold; having peace indeed, but no love or joy in the Holy Ghost."** This vacillation of feeling continued to trouble him for a time, though it was not long before he took a saner view of it.

On April 9, 1739, he writes John Edmonds: "I want stirring up, or rather, I want to be made alive. When shall I hear the voice of the Son of Man and live? Surely there never was such a deceiver of the people as I am. They reverance me as a saint, and I am a poor sinner."*** Such derogatory statements of his religious state are to be explained in much the same way as similar ones before May 24. Evidently there was some improvement in his condition for on April 16, he concludes a letter, "I am still dead and cold, unless while I am speaking."**** But on the 26th he again requests prayer, "Pray ye much that, after I have preached to others, I may not myself be a cast-away."***** A tired body may be a partial explanation

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 269.

**Ibid, P. 260.

***Ibid, P. 292.

****Ibid, P. 298.

*****Ibid, P. 301

of these moods, for on April 30, he writes, "Praise ye the Lord, who reneweth my bodily strength. May I feel in my soul that He is my strength and my salvation."*

The quotations from the letters that I have given will indicate the fluctuations of mind he experienced in regard to his conversion. It was quite natural that he should at first over-emphasize the place of feeling and have these vacillations, but it was not to be for long. He soon perceived that feeling was no adequate test of religion. In a letter written July 2, 1739, he says, "I was more dead and cold than ever.... I told them they must not judge of the spirits, either by common report, or by appearances, or by their own feelings. All these I warned them were of a doubtful nature in themselves, which might be of God or the devil; and were not simply to be condemned or relied upon, but to be tried by the law and the testimony."** Wesley was too clear minded to rely upon feeling as the test of conversion for long, and he speedily came to the view indicated above. Experience must be supported by the Bible and reason.

*Ibid, P. 304.

**Ibid, P. 325.

Wesley did not make emotion the real test of faith even in 1738 in his most formal utterances. In the sermon at Oxford three weeks after his experience he says that the assurance that accompanies faith is given but has not at all times the"same fulness of persuasion." It is as Winchester says, "After 1737 we never find in his Journal (or letters) such passages as just quoted. Many readers of the Journal have probably been surprised to notice that, during the last fifty years of his life, there is hardly a reference to his own emotions. He very seldom tells you how he felt. His faith is a healthy, settled, confidence, undisturbed by shifting moods."* This statement is true. Wesley had given over an introverted life that was engrossed with saving his own soul, and was now concerned with the salvation and reform of others, and in the multitudinous duties that demand indefatigable labor. He walked the way of righteousness supremely conscious of the Divine goodness and mercy. In this he was secure.

We cannot hope to trace Wesley's movements after the 24th of May. We may indicate in closing that he visited the Moravian brethren in Germany dur-

*Life of John Wesley,

ing the summer of 1738 and was greatly impressed by their community. Christian David particularly impressed him. In April, 1739, he preached in the field at Bristol. The Evangelical Revival was in full away. Wesley had at last found an experience that enabled him to find his work, in which he made no failure. For the next fifty years, with a never impoverished fountain of spiritual life, he led the hosts of God against sin and wickedness. It is not fanciful to say that we have traced the development of a religious experience which has changed the history of modern England, and, indeed, left its imprint on all the civilized world. Methodism was founded upon an experimental religion initiated and introduced through the able leadership and dynamic personality of John Wesley.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION.

Wesley was long searching for the true nature of Christianity. In a vital experience of religion he believed he had found it. He wrote to his brother Charles, September 21, 1739, that in some sermons he had clearly differentiated between "true old Christianity, commonly called by the new name of Methodism, and the Christianity now generally taught."* The very essence of this primitive Christianity he conceived to be in personal religion. Wesley was fond of using scriptural terms and phrases to express his meaning in preaching, for he thought all his doctrines were grounded in the Bible and verified by experience. The supreme accent of early Methodism was an experimental Christianity. This was at once its glory and its dynamic. The doctrines fundamental to Wesley and early Methodism were not abstract theological formulas, but those which had to do with a personal experience of a conscious salvation. These are comprehended under "saving faith," "witness of the Spirit," "the new birth," and "Christian Perfection."

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 338.

Of these, saving faith, witness of the Spirit, and Christian perfection are the most important and imply the others. It will be in order here to inquire as to what was meant by these terms.

Saving Faith.

"Saving Faith" was differentiated from an intellectual assent to the Gospel and made the instrument of salvation. Faith implied repentance which preceded it. But faith was the means of justification; we are saved by faith, not works. Faith conditions an experience of salvation. "It is the surrender of the soul to the helping grace of God." It is a personal reliance upon God for present salvation through Christ. Bohler had taught Wesley that it was the free gift of God. But he had also taught that one must seek for it. The human will is involved. As Fitchett observes, "Even the grace of God does not produce faith without the consent of the human will." Wesley learned through experience that the human volition must surrender in order "to be lifted to the great heights of rejoicing trust."

Wesley defined saving faith in a letter to Dr. Stebing written in July, 1729, as a "sure trust and confidence in God, that, by the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven and he is reconciled to the favor of God, and from this will spring many other things, as, the love of God shed abroad in his heart, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and joy in the Holy Ghost...joy, though not unfelt, yet unspeakable and full of glory."* In 1745 he gives the definition of faith in a letter to Thomas Church, "justifying faith implies, not only a divine conviction that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that He loved me and gave Himself for me."** Wesley maintained this definition in its important aspects throughout his ministry. Faith was simply a conscious sense of God's mercy through the merit of Christ which begot confidence and trust that the individual was saved personally.

The New Birth.

Wesley asserted that "Regeneration," or the

*Letters, Vol. I, P. 329.

**Ibid, Vol. II, P. 187.

"New Birth," was an essential doctrine of Christianity.* It is based upon the idea that one is corrupt naturally and must be reborn spiritually in order to attain true holiness. Wesley said all were "alienated from the life of God," and all our tempers and works in the natural state are only evil continually. Hence the need of a "great and mighty change." It must be a "thorough change of heart, and inward renewal in the spirit of our mind." The "Carnal heart gives place to a new heart, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, an heart full of faith which, working by love, produces all holiness of conversation." The New Birth, then, was an operation by the Holy Spirit upon the soul whereby the natural corruption of nature was cleansed away and the individual became a new man in Christ. It destroyed the chief hindrance to the Christian life and laid the foundation for all the Christian graces and fruits of the spirit. It occurred simultaneously with saving faith and the witness of the Spirit.

*Ibid, P. 38.

The Witness of the Spirit.

The "Witness of the Spirit" was simply a divine assurance of sonship or acceptance with God. Repentance, saving faith, and the New birth preceded in point of order for the spirit simply witnessed that these works had been accomplished. It's work was to give assurance of salvation. It was based largely on the passage in Romans, "His Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

There is some confusion in Wesley's Letters on this assurance of salvation. Faith is said to give a measure of assurance and produce peace and joy. Then the Holy Spirit is said to shed joy abroad in the heart, to give a conscious assurance of salvation. At times Wesley writes as though the witness of the spirit may be long delayed after one has exercised saving faith and experienced the new birth.* But whatever and whenever it came, the witness of the spirit was essentially a doctrine essential to a conscious salvation. God's spirit informed the individual that he was saved. All Christians should have this witness. Wesley almost makes it optional in saying, "I believe

*Ibid, P. 264.

every Christian who has not yet received it should pray for the witness of God's Spirit with his spirit that he is a child of God. In being a child of God, the pardon of his sins is included; therefore I believe the Spirit of God will witness this also."* This in 1738. In 1746 he writes, "I suppose that every Christian believer hath a direct perceptible testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God."** This doctrine was closely linked to the experimental religion, the conscious salvation emphasized during the Evangelical Revival.

Christian Perfection.

Christian Perfection, as developed by Wesley, did not imply perfection that was above mistakes of judgment or action, or inability to sin at all, but rather the realization of the two great commandments... love of God and neighbor...in a Christian's life. It implied all the other doctrines we have discussed. It was purity of heart, singleness of eye, the love of God, with all the heart, mind, and soul, and the

*Ibid, P. 274.

**Ibid, Vol. II, P. 75.

love of neighbor as oneself. It is the "holiness without which no one will see the Lord;" the sanctification which is the will of God."* Wesley describes one who is made perfect as "one God hath sanctified, even in body, soul, and spirit,'who walketh in the light as he is in the light,' 'in whom is no darkness at all;'" the blood of Jesus Christ His Son 'having cleansed him from all sin.'" This in 1747. For Wesley it was the ideal of the Christian life and its fullest expression was in the love of God and man.

In a letter to Thomas Olivers, March 24, 1757, he says that Christian Perfection has been fully discussed in two sermons, the minutes of the conference, the preface of the second and third volumes of hymns, and some of his controversial writings. He then goes on to say that, "It undoubtedly implies salvation from all sin, inward and outward, into all holiness. Without it none can be admitted into heaven, nor be completely happy upon earth. Study to recommend it as amiable and desirable rather than as necessary. A gradual growth

*Heb. 12:14 and I Thess. 2:3.

in grace precedes, but the gift itself is always given instantaneously. One fruit given at the same instant (at least usually) is a direct, positive testimony of the Spirit that the work is done, that they cannot fall away, that they cannot sin. In consequence of this they have no slavish fear, but uninterrupted sight, love, and joy, with continual growth in wisdom, holiness, and happiness, till they are all filled with all the fulness of God."* Does this statement represent Wesley's settled conviction upon the subject? Whether it does or not, the quotation will give us insight into the fact that it was the ideal to be realized in the experimental religion of the Evangelical Revival, and as such played a valuable part in it.

It is interesting to note Wesley's own testimony regarding the experience of this doctrine in his life. We are aware how devoted he was to God, how earnestly he set about making religion the business of his life, but I find no indication in his correspondence that he professed this experience himself. Rather the reverse. He says of his experience in 1755, "I know that I am accepted; and yet that

*Letters, Vol. III, P. 213.

knowledge is sometimes shaken, though not destroyed, by doubt or fear."* Again, in November, 1755, after mentioning the fact that he contended for the inward kingdom, the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the image of God to be stamped upon the heart, he says, "I am sometimes much discouraged at finding so little of this in myself."** We will agree with his statement written in 1756, "to make profession does not belong to me; it is quite foreign to my character."*** But even so, the foregoing quotations do not indicate holiness attained. Back in 1748 he indignantly denies that he ever professed "Christian perfection." "I never told you so, nor anyone else. I no more imagine that I have already attained, that I already love God with all my heart, soul, and strength, than that I am in the third heavens." Perhaps Wesley does not do himself justice in these statements. We can imagine no one more consecrated and devoted to the "glory of God and the good of men" than Wesley was at this time. It is obvious that Wesley did not harp constantly upon Christian Perfection either as his experience or in his sermons. The doctrine fitted into Wesley's

*Ibid, Vol. III, P. 138.

**Ibid, Vol. III, P. 153.

***Ibid, Vol. II, P. 140.

doctrine and did its part in the revival.

We have seen, then, the essential doctrines having to do with the experimental religion of early Methodism. They were its soul and its genius. Religion as an experience is the key to it. In concluding, let me quote Wesley again showing the relation of these doctrines to each other. "The most essential parts of real, experimental religion, beginning at the very rise of it in the soul are, namely, repentance toward God, a broken and a contrite heart, going on to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby he that believeth is born of God, to the love of God shed abroad in the heart, 'attended with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,' to our subsequent wrestling, not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and wicked spirits in high places, and thence to perfect love, the loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength." *

The personal and vital religious experience of Wesley and his followers might have had its excesses and its excressences, but it ministered to a hungry

*Letters, Vol. III, P.

world and contributed magnificantly to a higher standard of living, and a better moral and religious atmosphere. Perhaps the true nature of primitive Christianity was discovered as Wesley fondly believed.

THE SUMMARY.

PART I.

Prepatory Period.

The life of John Wesley was launched propitiously. He came of a priestly line of ancestors who were at once strong willed, original thinkers, and deeply religious. From them Wesley, no doubt, inherited a capacity for and a predilection to religion. Not only so, but in common with the rest of the Epworth family he was bequeathed a sound mind, possessed of a logical bent and inclined to be thorough. Wesley was not original but he did possess to a remarkable degree a judgment that was capable of separating the chaff from the wheat if given time.

The home training at Epworth accentuated and developed these qualities already mentioned. Both the intellectual and religious natures were stimulated and trained in the right direction by a saintly and sagacious mother. Religion, particularly, made its early

impress upon his soul. The poverty and discipline of the home contributed toward his Method-istic life. The child was father to the man.

Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford, aided in the development of the studious habits which became an integral part of John Wesley. There he laid the foundation for a broad scholarship that was to prove intensely valuable in his later work. He gained an appreciation of the past by his study of the classics,which perhaps had something to do with his reverence for tradition in the Christian church. The knowledge of the Greek language g ained during this period enabled him better to get at the heart of Christianity by reading the Greek Testament. A necessity for extreme care in the handling of the money he received made him economical and thrifty all his life.

PART II.

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONING AND ANSWER.

Approaching graduation at Christ Church, Oxford, forced Wesley to serious consideration of what his life work was to be. A natural bent toward religion,

the ancestral example, and parental counsel, decided him to take orders. With the thoroughness characteristic of his nature he began to inquire about the real nature of Christianity. Henceforth, his quest was to be for a knowledge and experience of the genius of primitive Christianity. A mind inclined to be thorough and a nature with a capacity for intense religious convictions and experiences were back of this search for reality in religion. Perhaps it was the most decisive year of his life.

During this year he read the "Christian Pattern" by Kempis, and "Holy Living and Dying" by Taylor. Both of these books influenced Wesley to take religion seriously as well as opening up new aspects of Christianity. The former also inclined him to a monastic type of piety while the latter accentuated his sacerdotalism. Both contributed largely to the moral strenuousness of life by which he attempted to work out his salvation in conjunction with his strict use of the instituted means of grace.

About this time he read William Law's "Serious Call" and "Christian Perfection." They influenced him profoundly in the direction he was already tending and

heightened his conception of the demands of religion. The latter book contained seed which fell upon fertile soil and led to the development of the doctrine of Christian Perfection, along with the two already mentioned. A distinct tendency to interpret religion more as an inner life rather than mere outward observance of religion also resulted from reading Law.

The year 1726 saw him take up his work at Lincoln College. The two following years spent at Wroote were not particularly notable. In 1729 he returned to Lincoln where he found the Oxford Club organized, which he proceeded to lead and influence. Their discussions of religion probably contributed something toward an understanding of Christianity. But these years find Wesley without any evangelical temper and solely bent upon saving his own soul. Law became his spiritual advisor and influenced him toward mysticism, which he later rejected. His emphasis is upon the church as the means of salvation, and a rigorous discipline of life as the best way to holiness.

In 1735 he went to Georgia and on the trip over became conscious of a vital lack in his own religious experience, through contact with the Moravians. His

ministry in Georgia was unevangelical, sacerdotal in character, and rather barren of results. Wesley was perturbed in soul and restless during this period. The love for and loss of Sophia Hopkey accentuated this feeling. The comparative failure of this enterprise, combined with the scandal that destroyed his usefulness in Georgia, sent him back to England in a fit of despondency. His contact with the Moravians, the failure of his own conception of religion, and the consciousness of his own lack of vital religion, were the values the mission produced. His experience prepared him for the reception of an evangelical faith.

Peter Bohler introduced Wesley to a justification faith and stimulated his search for a satisfying experience of religion. His evangelical temper grew apace during the early months of 1738 and the emphasis shifts from sacerdotalism and self-discipline to "saving faith" and the "witness of the Spirit." Wesley was convinced of experimental religion by the testimony of scripture and the confirmation of experience. His "heart was strangely warmed" on May 24th. This he considered a decisive experience in his life, which, indeed, it was. Wesley had at last found an answer to

his question as to the genius of primitive Christianity in experimental religion.

PART III.

At first there were fluctuations of feeling after the experience of May 24, 1738, that Wesley laid too much emphasis upon. He soon saw, however, that feeling was no adequate test of religion, though he still continued to hold to the "assurance of faith" and the "witness of the spirit" as essential elements in experimental Christianity. After a few years Wesley's experience settled down into an unchanging dynamic that drove him ceaselessly in his masterful leadership of the Evangelical Revival. Henceforth experimental religion was the keynote of Wesley's ministry and of Methodism.

The doctrines relating to a personal salvation of an experimental type preached by the Methodists are comprehended in "saving faith," the "new birth," "witness of the spirit," and "Christian perfection." Saving faith is a personal reliance and confident trust upon God through the merits of Christ that one is saved.

It is the attitude which appropriates the salvation made possible through Christ. The new birth is the change wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit whereby it is regenerated and cleansed from the natural corruption of nature and made into the "image of God." The witness of the Spirit was the witness of God's Spirit upon the soul that one is saved, and implies a conscious salvation. Christian perfection consisted in being free from sin, both inner and outer, and in loving God with all ones mind and soul. It was an ideal to be attained after the experience of justification by faith.

FINAL SUMMARY.

As we have seen, Wesley is to be interpreted in the light of herditary tendencies and environmental influences. He was not an originator but he was a clear and consistent thinker, possessed of a good judgment and always willing to learn. He started out in quest of true Christianity and went to school to many teachers. Kempis, Taylor, Law, and the Moravians taught him in turn. In his quest he embraced, at least in part, sacerdotalism, asceticism, and mysticism, before discovering the experimental and practical religion which he finally adopted.

In accepting this he used fundamentally a scientific procedure, first searching the meaning of the New Testament in the original language, and then testing it in the laboratory of life. Having been convinced of its truth, he sought and experienced it for himself, and then immediately forgot himself in interpreting it to others. The religion he preached was sane and sensible, and in its real essence is applicable to any century.

Wesley, then, was no religious freak, nor yet the direct gift of God, but a normal man in the light of influences brought to bear upon him. He is as perfectly understandable as is any other outstanding figure in history, and more so than many. His religious experience was of immense significance to his generation, and to posterity. We have traced the development of a personal religion in the life ofJohn Wesley, founder of Methodism, and one of the great characters in the history of Christiandom. He had, as Matthew Arnold said, "a genius for Godliness."

THE END.

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